

Caught On Tape

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Caught On Tape

by [CestPasDuBaudelaire](#)

Summary

Doctor J. Rufin died a month ago and no one gives a damn fuck.
Until someone realizes that, in the 70s, Doctor J. Rufin was the psychiatrist of a very strange little boy. Or maybe just a very traumatized one.

Or

Recordings of Hannibal Lecter's therapy sessions from age 13 to 17 find their way to Jack's desk and the scarred man has no other choice but to suffer through them, with the haunting ghost of the Ripper flying and laughing over his head.

But Hannibal is one of those creatures for whom the more you learn about them, the less you understand.

Reaction fic where Jack watches videos of young Hannibal with his psychiatrist.

Notes

Salut les gens !

I hope you're doing alright!

I'm in a break from my bigger project but what can I say, I can't resist the call of the OS!

If you've arrived here from the series, you must know by now, it is the same thing over and over. I'm just obsessed with the trope explored by the series, so there's nothing new, it's just taking a new shapes.

For others, I wrote this around a mixture of canons from the show and the books, and some other stuffs thrown in the midst.

The only thing we have in the show is that Hannibal was adopted by Robertus at 16yo, but there is just too much stuff happening in his childhood for me to stick to it, so, sorry about that, but I think that, for those who know the books, you'll be able to tell where I wanted to go with all this.

In terms of warning, mentions of cannibalism and murder but like... what's new? Also, mention of underage (17yo) incestuous feelings and more, but it is 100% off screen. It is only spoken about, and nothing graphical or even slightly evocative. I brought it up for what it reveals of Hannibal character and story, not for any other reason. The mentions of Child

abuse are kept very light and, once again, not graphical. It is a story that is focused on the building of Hannibal into the man he will become, more than it is about trauma or suffering. The one suffering the most here is clearly Jack.

Anyway, I think it's all I had to say. I'm sorry if it's a bit fuzzy, it's 2am, and this fic is the result of 3 full days of work with very little sleep, I can barely think straight anymore.

I will leave you to it, enjoy!

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

CAUGHT ON TAPE

"A guy named Doctor J. Rufin died on the other side of the Atlantic last month."

Nothing in that sentence was coming close to triggering Jack Crawford's interest. Though, to be honest, not much had been able to for the past couple of years. It had grown too cold, too tired. Too worn out.

"Natural death. Just, you know, old age."

In the bureau, Jack had the reputation of being able to communicate his thoughts with a single glance. Nothing more was needed for the younger agents to know just how much in trouble they were. It was becoming truer with each passing year. Jack didn't talk much anymore. If he were to try, he didn't think he could even produce a clear sound. His throat was too tight and rough. It was easier to let Price or Zeller monologue for him. And he didn't have much left to say anyway.

This time was no different. Why the hell would he care about what was currently being said to him? A man had died, somewhere else. How damn sad for him. Yet, he could sense how increasingly uncomfortable his interlocutor was growing. And how stagnant the conversation was threatening to become.

"Why are you telling me this, Camille?"

"Listen, Jack..."

The Interpol agent took the time to sigh. She had taken her hat off to put it on her lap, and her hands were now fidgeting around it. Not out of anxiety. Camille and Jack had known each other for too long to be worried. But she sure was searching for her words.

"... I wasn't sure you would want to hear about it. They told me it could be a bad idea. They told me you're not taking cases anymore."

"I'm doing pencil pushing now. The pay's better."

"Come on, man. We know you don't care about that."

"There's nothing I can do about it. I've been demoted. To a higher, more honorary place, but demoted nonetheless."

"Because you wanted to. Cause you didn't fight it, Jack. And... You know what? I really didn't come here to talk about that. I get that the blow was... pretty hard."

"You get that?"

"Not here to fight, my friend. I'm just here to tell you about Rufin. I heard it from a friend from the police of Paris. He knows I know you, so he told me about it."

"Once and for all, why would I care?"

Jack regretted asking the question the second it left his mouth. In a blink, he was violently reminded why he didn't talk anymore. Every conversation, every question, every step forward seemed to lead back to the same disastrous epicenter.

"Well... He was Lecter's shrink."

Jack leaned back into his armchair. His face didn't have much emotion anymore. No matter how he felt, about anything, it would remain unmoved and silent. Only his eyes were still voicing something, and it was never beyond the spectrum of his annoyance.

"I'm not working on that anymore," he said, his throat tighter, his words sounding muffled even to his own ears.

"I know. I... I don't want to open old wounds or anything Jack. I just thought... I just thought you deserved to choose whether or not you wanted to see them."

"See what?"

"The videos. Rufin. He was recording his sessions. It's old and a lot of the recordings have been lost, but we found a handful of Lecter's in his home office in Essonne."

The words shallowly rang in Jack's ears, bringing no meaning with them. His brain was repeating them as if the sounds alone would suddenly make sense, on their own accords. Unsurprisingly, they did not.

"I don't work on the case anymore," Jack simply repeated.

"I told you. It is not about that."

"Then what is it about?"

"I just thought that, if you thought maybe it could bring... I don't know... anything..."

"Closure?"

"Maybe. I wouldn't know."

"I'd need more than that to find closure, Camille."

"You're the only one who can tell, Jack. I'm just saying. If you want them, they are yours. No one would argue against it. If anyone deserves to see them, it's you. Lecter's yours."

'Lecter's yours.'

The words remained with him for a while. More than the words, their implication. Camille hadn't thought twice about them, Jack could tell. Yet, they were bringing with them meaningful ghosts. Jack was somehow entitled to Lecter. Linked to him that he was, having shared that intimacy that the whole world knew about.

'No one's blaming you'. They were all so eager to spit those words at his feet. 'It's not your fault'. After Lecter's disappearance, everything had been scrutinized. Every word that had been uttered, every letter that had been sent, every plan that had been made had been dissected by every mind capable of thought and judgment. They all agreed on one thing, now. Hannibal Lecter was closer to fiction than reality, and none could ever bend him to human laws. Though they all believed they would have somehow done better, it was a widely shared opinion that blaming Jack for Lecter's freedom was an unfair judgment.

Yet the results were the same.

Lecter was gone. Graham was... dead, Jack was desperate to believe.

And Jack was still trapped under the monstrous shadow, weighted by guilt and bitterness.

Lecter was his. And would be so forever. No more would Jack's name be said without the title of the Chesapeake Ripper following like an afterthought. Like a goddamn bridal train.

Jack didn't open Camille's email for days which turned into months. It remained there, unopened and unread, a darker line in his box. At home, he would leave his computer in his wife's study. To make it easier to ignore it. Keeping it out of reach. At work, he would stare at the desktop without seeing anything past the colors of the official wallpaper. When he couldn't keep his mind away, he would sign a couple of papers he hadn't read, stock a few files on top of each other to justify his pay.

The hardest was in the car. His hands on the wheel, his feet on the pedals, the radio blasting the latest songs, there was something in the emptiness that made the car seem filled to the rim. As if someone was sitting next to him, on the passenger seat, humming softly to the music.

He finally opened the email on one of those days. He didn't know which day it was, but it was one of those. Those that felt like anniversaries. Was it when he had first met Lecter? Was it when Graham had left in the morning, never to be seen again? Was it Beverly's death? Was it Abigail Hobbs'?

Jack didn't want to know for he feared to realize it was something else. Something Lecter had successfully corrupted once again. His wife's last days, or his first meeting with Alana. If Hannibal Lecter had taught Jack anything it was how painful knowing could become.

In any case, it didn't truly matter. What mattered was that it felt like an anniversary, and that Jack couldn't keep the thought at bay any longer.

He had played with the band-aid for too long, and even if the wound underneath was purulent, it now needed to be ripped off.

Jack didn't watch it at home. Lecter was already everywhere, in every room his wife had walked through, and he didn't need more of his presence here. He didn't watch it in Quantico either. Not between the glass walls of his office, not with Price and Zeller, survivors in ways he was not, right next door.

Instead, one evening, as he couldn't eat nor sleep, he took his keys, his computer, and he drove through the rain, from Virginia to Maryland. Lecter's house and practice had never been sold. The higher ups had said they didn't want them to become places of pilgrimage. Jack didn't believe that even ten years would pass after Lecter's death before a museum of horrors would open in one or both of the locations.

But for now, they belonged to the FBI and no one would dare to question Jack for being here.

After all... Lecter was his.

He didn't drive by the house. The mere thought of it seemed able to poison his mind. Instead, he stopped by the practice. He didn't go far here either. He couldn't bring himself to walk through the door, into the main room. Where he would see the chair where his wife had opened up to the Ripper. Where Will had played and lost against an enemy Jack himself had put on his path. Where the books inspiring Lecter's monstrous mind were innocently sitting on shelves. As if they were just any books on any shelves that had inspired any mind. As if there was anything about that practice that was innocent.

Instead, Jack remained in the waiting room. He sat on the same chair he had sat on the day he had brought Lecter into everyone's life. And before he could wonder how much of a bad omen it was, he opened his computer on his lap and clicked on the link.

No one was paying for the internet anymore, and it was through his phone that his computer could access it, which meant that the downloading time was considerably slowed down. As if the universe was giving Jack a new excuse to change his mind.

But lethargy was too entrancing and changing his mind now seemed offensively too late to him. Instead, he took his phone, and looked at the bright screen for a moment. Instinctively, on muscle memory alone, he opened his contact list and scrolled down.

His fingers lingered for a while on the 'G' section then, guiltily, they scrolled back up to the 'B's.

The name of Alana Bloom appeared in bold letters. It was a useless number. She hadn't answered it ever since Lecter had left Baltimore in a police van. She had taken her

wife and her child and had disappeared with an efficiency only rightful paranoia could master. This phone number led to nothing but silence. Yet, Jack felt the irrepressible need to write down something. Anything. A final will of sorts. She was the last one who could understand. The last one left standing with him.

Diving in deep. Hope there'll be a way back.

His computer made a soft sound the second he pressed the send button on his phone. The downloading was complete and six new files had now joined the memory of Jack's computer.

The mouse hovered over the first title.

LecterHannibal_12oct1976

The sound of the click came as a surprise, Jack having not felt his finger make the decision his brain couldn't. Before he could feel regret or relief, the video started.

An office, with a desk and two large windows on one of the walls. The other one was hidden behind a large bookshelf, carefully organized in the cluttered yet pleasing way scholar offices tended to feature.

A back could be seen. Rufin's, Jack guessed. The camera was clearly set to capture the visage of whoever was sitting on the other side.

The colors were vivid yet hesitant, as they always were in old movies, yet the subject of the video was captured with precision.

There were three people sitting in front of Rufin. A man with high cheekbones and brown eyes, dressed in a suit that must have been eccentric even for the standards of the place and time. Jack, who was used to getting information from first impressions, could tell from the waistcoat alone a decent amount of money and a confident taste for fashion. He had seen it all before... The man was noticeably tall and, though his slender silhouette had nothing to impress, the rectitude of his holding was letting everyone know he was a man of control. A

thin and well-groomed mustache and slick hair were completing a portrait of distinction. Yet, there was a kindness on his face that contradicted the natural severity of his features. His wrinkles, few but deep, were the results of too much smiling and his dark eyes were twinkling with joy and light-hearted mischief.

The woman, sitting on the opposite side, was shorter, with long black hair falling freely on her back and dark unreadable eyes. Her face seemed as inscrutable as the man's was open. She was wearing a white robe that seemed to have cost as much money as the man's suit, yet didn't stand out as much, aiming for greater sobriety though equal refinement.

In between the two adults, a child was sitting. Nothing could be seen of his face as his head was leaning forward, as if it was too heavy to be carried. His eyes and features were completely hidden in the shadows. His hair, which could be seen, was short, as if barely growing back after having been shaved close to the skin. He was dressed in a pullover that was falling on extremely thin and frail shoulders, the collar, too large for the neck, was gaping on the front of the torso, revealing a brown shirt underneath. The kid was made drastically smaller by the two tall adults by his side, but even without them, he would have still stood out for his apparent weakness.

A voice softly echoed, while no mouth moved, and Jack guessed that Rufin had started to speak. Gathering back his focus, Jack began to read the subtitles so as to understand the French that was being spoken, while keeping an eye on the three people facing the lens.

"I hope you won't mind us going through it all over again. I know you already answered those questions, but I would like to hear it myself."

"Not at all," the man said. "It is quite understandable. Ask away."

"You're the uncle and the aunt, is that correct?"

"Yes. I am Robertus Lecter, and this is my wife, Sheba. Hannibal is my brother's son."

The last word sat awkwardly in Jack's mind. There was something inherently wrong in thinking that Hannibal was a son like any other human being. Yet there it was stated. Hannibal was the son of someone's brother.

"And Hannibal has been with you for how long, exactly?"

"Well, we met again... When was it... In August, wasn't it? The end of it."

Though the man was turned toward the child, the child did not answer, which didn't seem to bother Robertus Lecter who continued all the same.

"Yes, august, I think. I stayed there for a week or so. And Sheba met him at the beginning of September, I believe."

"He stayed at the hospital for quite some time," the woman said in a low, soft voice. "Hannibal and I didn't see much of each other during that time. We thought it would be better for Robertus to be the most present figure. He had a very weak immune system, and it wasn't too wise to multiply the contacts. But he has moved in with us by the end of September. That is when we called you for that appointment."

"I see."

For a few seconds, there was nothing but a scratching noise, letting Jack guess that Rufin was taking some notes in addition to the recordings. Which made him wonder whether or not the patients even knew they were being filmed. Not once the eyes of the adults had wandered toward the camera which, from Jack's experience, was very unlikely to happen if the subject knew about the camera's existence.

"Why exactly did he have to stay at the hospital for so long? Or at all?"

"Well, I knew seeing a Doctor would be a priority. Even simply to be on the safe side. But I found him to be very lethargic during the trip back to France. He was barely responsive so, once in Paris, I stopped by the hospital before getting home."

As he was speaking, Robertus Lecter's eyes were on the child, his hand fondly caressing the short hair.

The boy was reacting to nothing that was being said around him nor about him.

"What did they have to say?" the Doctor asked. "At the hospital."

"They said the main problem was malnourishment. He also had some infections. They said that, thankfully, he wasn't in his first years so the long-term consequences of starvation will not be as bad as they could have been but Hannibal was not in very good health when he arrived."

"I am sorry, you will have to educate me here. Is Lithuania a particularly poor country?"

"No, I wouldn't say that. But it greatly suffered from the war and from the current occupation. Orphanages are not a place of opulence. Too many children, not enough money. It is the same problem everywhere. Maybe even more so there."

"Thankfully, he is with you now. This is a problem that will solve itself easily enough."

For a moment, none answered and, though it wasn't a question per say, the silence that followed the statement had the tone of a confession.

"Will it not?"

The man and the woman looked at each other for a moment before facing the Doctor again.

"Hannibal doesn't really eat," Sheba Lecter said.

"What do you mean, he does not really eat?"

"Every bite's a fight," Robertus Lecter explained. "Someday, he will try a bit. Most, he won't. He also doesn't keep a lot of things down. That is why they kept him for so long, at the hospital. They tried to force feed him, but I couldn't bear it. It seemed... it just seemed wrong. I know he needs to eat but it looked more like torture than care."

Robertus' hand was now on the boy's shoulder, though his eyes were turned toward his memories, frowning at their violence.

"I finally ordered them to stop. I thought my nephew would be better off if he could come home at last. Be with his family. Though he is still not eating."

"You were right," the woman said without hesitation.

Jack could tell by her tone that she had said that exact sentence on that exact topic several times before.

"It is better for him to be with us. The hospital is not a solution."

The man nodded though his doubt seemed to be settled only temporarily.

"You didn't come to see me about eating disorders, though, did you?" the Doctor asked while flipping through some documents in front of him.

"As a matter of fact, no," Robertus Lecter said. "If you can help him with that, that would be appreciated, but we are actually here under the recommendation of the hospital."

"For catatonia."

"Yes. They did some tests. They used a scale."

"The Bush-Francis scale?"

"Yes, I believe so. Or something that sounded like that. He scored worryingly high, according to them and he didn't react to medication. They tried some... uh... Benzo..."

"Benzodiazepines?"

"Yes. That. Didn't do much. Or at all, actually. They were surprised by the lack of results, they said a psychiatric treatment would be needed to monitor the situation and keep an eye on his progresses. But they seem to think time was the best medicine for now."

The Doctor leaned back in his armchair, and just like Jack, he detailed the silent boy for a moment. Though the nature of their thoughts about him couldn't have been more opposite.

"You said he seemed lethargic to you," Rufin finally said. "You mean he fell into that catatonic state sometime during the trip to France?"

"Well..."

The man stroked his mustache for a second, giving some careful thoughts to the question.

"I am not sure. He was not very reactive before either. We certainly didn't have a conversation on the steps of the orphanage. And the director said so himself. That Hannibal didn't speak, I mean. He was convinced he was mute. Maybe deaf also, but that I know is

untrue. I can also attest that he had no trouble speaking when he was younger. We didn't spend much time together, but he was quite the eloquent little boy. So I guess, when I found him at the orphanage, he was already a bit... like he is now. But, still, I would say not as much. He was meeting eyes, answering to his names, the kind of things he barely does anymore..."

Stopping in the middle of his sentence, the man seemed hit by a sudden thought, and a sincere worry darkened his light features made for carefreeness.

"Is it possible that we made it worse? If he became more unresponsive after I took him with me, does that mean I should have left him where he was?"

Rufin interrupted the thought right away.

"Mister Lecter, I can't tell you much right now. I will need to speak to Hannibal before anything else and, in any case, whatever it is that we will have to do, it will be a long road. But that, I can tell you without the shadow of a doubt. You did well to bring him back with you. Providing Hannibal with a safe and loving home is the priority here and if that is what you are doing, then I promise you, Mister Lecter, you are doing nothing wrong by him."

Robertus nodded and smiled to Hannibal. The boy couldn't have seen it, however, as his head hadn't moved since the beginning of the conversation.

"Now, Hannibal," Rufin resumed in a higher, softer voice "I would like to have a word with your aunt and uncle. Would you mind giving us a moment? You can play with everything you see in the waiting room. Nothing is off limits."

Jack sensed the muscles of his back tense despite himself. His eyes lingered on the boy, half expecting him to leap forward to sink his small, pointy teeth into the Doctor's neck. Or to hold his head at last, letting the sunlight fall on monstrous features, between a beast and a demon. But nothing of that sort happened.

The boy remained still.

After a second, the woman put a light hand on his shoulder, as if to softly show him the way and, yet another second later, with the delay inert objects forced into motion would have, he stood up. Jack instinctively averted his gaze, but at no point did the boy raise his eyes, keeping them safely down.

His aunt, following him, walked him to the door and disappeared for less than a minute before reappearing alone.

"I should maybe stay with him."

"No, I need to speak with you as well, Madam. Do not worry. My wife will keep a watchful eye on him, you can rest easy."

The woman walked back to the desk and sat down on her chair once again, not without exchanging a look with her husband who softly took her hand, holding it while their attention went back to the Doctor.

"I must reiterate what I said in case it wasn't heard," Rufin said. "You did well to bring him with you. It is obvious, considering the dire state you found him in, that this orphanage was no place for him to stay."

He marked a pause, as if to make sure his words were reaching their destination.

"The path to mental health is not as linear as we would wish it to be. A regression does not necessarily tell us what we think it does. Though it is always worth noticing and questioning, it is not always a negative sign. You said yourself that he was already somewhat unresponsive when you found him. His regression could be linked to the fact that he has been moved to a safer environment, less demanding on him. He may not be doing worse. That kind of apparent regression can often be seen when people physically move away from a source of trauma, yet it does not mean they fret any better while the trauma was taking place. Mister Lecter, what do you know about his life at the orphanage?"

"Not much, actually. I was so relieved to find him, I did not question anything. I stayed long enough to sign everything that needed to be signed, to pay everyone that could speed up the process, and I hastened my way home."

"How were the other children?" Sheba Lecter asked.

The man gave the question some thoughts, searching through his memories.

"They all seemed pretty weak, now that you mention it. Especially the younger ones. It wasn't as striking as Hannibal but I think that even those who were willing to eat didn't have access to what a growing body requires. A lot of them were coughing, I remember. There were many of them, too many for where they were living, I guess diseases would spread quickly in those settings. And they said that starvation..."

"Yes, it can weaken the immune system."

"Not the best place to raise a child, let alone hundreds of them."

"What kind of orphanage was it?" Rufin asked. "What I mean by that is, what was their approach when it comes to children? Was it authoritarian? Neglectful? Permissive?"

"I only caught glimpses of that place but... I don't know if it was authoritarian. I knew they had some kind of peer discipline going on. With older kids in uniforms. But I think they were mostly left to themselves. When I asked to see Hannibal, the director had no idea where he was. I think most of the children were left outside all day long, only gathered for the meals and the night. That's what I guessed from the little I saw, and Hannibal didn't tell us anything about it, of course."

"He has scars, however," Sheba Lecter intervened.

"Scars?"

"Yes. I help him dress and bathe. I see them. On his neck and the back of his head. On his wrists too and his back."

"Self-inflicted? The ones on his wrists."

"No. But I don't know what may have caused them."

"If he wants to show them to me one day, I would like to have a look. But that won't be for now."

Rufin wrote a couple of words in his notebook and Jack craned his neck as if he could somehow read above the Doctor's shoulder.

"What do you know about the parents and how they may have treated Hannibal?"

"Andrius and Simonetta are fantastic human beings and perfect parents," Robertus Lecter said at once, on the defensive. "I don't know what happened, but what I can tell you is that it happened to them, not the other way around."

"He is not blinded by familial loyalty," the woman said. "It is true. Andrius and Simonetta are quite the exceptional couple. They are both loving and wouldn't be able to hurt someone even if they wanted to. And certainly not their own children. If they only knew, they would be the first to move heaven and earth to heal every single injury."

Jack had never wondered about Lecter's parents. In his mind, nothing could birth such a thing. No human womb, at least.

However, a more logical and less enlightened part of him knew that most serial killers came from disastrous family situations. Not the kind of figures that were currently sitting in front of that desk, nor the two parents being mentioned through such high opinions.

"What kind of relationship do you have with them?"

Robertus Lecter's lips curled slightly, revealing how sensitive the question was for him.

"Not as close as I would wish. My brother and I... we fell apart."

"Why that?"

"Politics, I guess. The downfall of many families. He chose to stay in Lithuania and build a family there, when it is the country that saw our father's execution and our forced exile. I never understood why he went back to that cursed castle, especially to raise children. And if he had never come back... Or if he had left after Hannibal's birth like I begged him to..."

"You think the current political situation in Lithuania has something to do with all that?"

"I don't know. There is no point in throwing accusations around. Maybe it has something to do with the current regime, maybe it doesn't. I know my brother and his wife were not the kind to remain indifferent. Which I understand. I've always admired them for that, and I try to be as kind and good-hearted as them. But I live in France. My kindness doesn't come with the same price. All I know for sure is that there is not a single stone in all of Lithuania Simonetta and Andrius would have left unturned if they were searching for their children. Them being in prison is the only explanation I can find for such a disastrous situation."

Jack could easily picture another explanation. And so could Sheba Lecter, judging by the sad look she gave her husband, though her silence didn't betray her dark thoughts.

"When was the last time you heard from them?"

"We received a letter, four years ago," the woman answered. "They would send a letter a year, to tell us about the children. After that last letter, nothing. We began to worry two years ago."

It was the fourth time now that they had used the plural form to talk about the couple's children. Did Lecter have any siblings? If so, Jack had never heard about them. Though, to be honest, he had never heard about the parents either. Lecter had that unsuspected skill to say very little in many words and it was only a few years ago that Jack had begun to realize the sheer amount of information he didn't have on Lecter. He had considered him his best friend for about a year, yet he had never questioned the fact that he didn't know the first thing about the man's family.

Rufin apparently picked up on the plural form as well though he didn't seem as surprised.

"There is a sister, is that correct?"

"Yes," Robertus Lecter nodded. "Mischa Lecter. I have not found her yet, but it is only a matter of time. Here, that's her..."

The man took a picture from his jacket and handed it to the Doctor. The angle of the camera didn't allow Jack to see it, but the ease of the gesture told him that it was the kind of picture that was always there, close to the heart, and ready to be shown around.

Jack wondered if, three months ago, a picture of Hannibal Lecter had also been in the same pocket.

"She should be five now. I know she is but a baby in this picture, but I am still certain I will find her. I found Hannibal after all."

"Indeed. And I guess you're hoping that Hannibal could help you..."

"I'm relieved to have found him and I am infinitely grateful for that but..."

A moment of silence settled after that 'but', the kind that was always too common in psychiatric offices.

"You can be grateful for Hannibal and hopeful for his sister," Rufin finally stepped in.

"The director said he hadn't heard of a sister. When he was brought to him, Hannibal was alone. But I'm thinking that, if I knew when was the last time he had seen Mischa, that could help me a lot."

"But for that you'll need him to talk."

"We have not brought him here so he can be interrogated," Sheba said. "It is obvious that he needs help, and that is what we came to find. That being said, we are very worried for Mischa. We have no idea where she may be and we fear time is a key factor here. If she has been anything as unlucky as Hannibal, we must hurry to find her."

"Once again, I can't tell you much right now. I will need to speak to Hannibal in any case. But I promise you I will do my best to help you with the sister."

"Thank you, Doctor."

The video stopped on the few polite sentences meant to end conversations, without much care for the editing, showing that Rufin had most certainly thought that everything of importance had already been said.

The silence befell the waiting room and Jack, who feared at once to get lost in his thoughts, realized that, forty years ago, and only a screen away, Hannibal Lecter too had been waiting in a waiting room. Maybe one exactly like this one. Taken by a sudden surge of uneasiness, Jack stood up, leaving his computer behind and grabbing his coat to step outside, into the cold autumn night.

For a moment, he remained there, standing in the middle of the deserted sidewalk, with nothing but the white condensation of his breath to keep him company. When the first droplets of rain began to fall, Jack realized they were getting closer and closer to that night where he had nearly died in Lecter's pantry. Though he was in front of his practice instead of his house. Which was fitting in a weirdly poetic way.

Hannibal had tried to maim his body in his house, and it was now his mind he was messing with in the clinical setting of his practice.

That motherfucker would be so pleased if he knew.

As if a laugh of fate, Jack's phone chose that precise moment to ring. During an insane second, Jack was convinced it was Lecter. He was convinced that, somehow, the twisted bastard *knew* and was calling to gloat.

It took him all the strength of his reason and logic to remind himself that it was impossible for Lecter to make such a stupid mistake. It had to be someone else.

He looked at his phone's screen, glanced at the unknown number and picked up the call, bringing the device to his ear.

"Jack Crawford."

"Hello, Jack."

He recognized that voice at once. Clear and low, with a tiredness it didn't have five years ago.

"Hello Alana. You got my text."

"I managed. I don't want to be contacted Jack, especially not by you... But I figured you may need a way out."

"If there's any."

"What is it, Jack?"

"I didn't want to drag you with me. I just thought..."

"You just thought being alone sucked. "

"Yes... Something like that, I guess. "

Jack silenced his apologies. It was too obvious to need to be worded.

"I don't want to say it is nothing, for it is not. But..."

He already knew what was going to come after that. He had the same thoughts every night.

"I already live in fear, Jack," Alana continued. "The shadows of my houses take his shape. I don't want to be made to think about him, but here he is. I guess you can see it as one last favor. One night of mutual companionship before we both continue on our miserable and diseased path."

Jack hesitated to feel guilty for a moment. Or more exactly, to feel guilty for yet another reason. But Alana was right. Companionship sounded better than what he could truly hope for.

"How is Morgan?" he tried to ask conversationally.

"Don't speak of him. Not tonight. Not standing where you are standing. You're there, aren't you? You went back?"

"I'm outside of his office. His house... I couldn't. Mine either. I'm on the street right now. Took a break. Will have to head back inside eventually."

"What is it about, this time? A new clue? A suggestion he left behind?"

"I'm not trying to catch him. This time, I'm just listening. Nothing can be gained. On him at least. I guess I'm hoping there's something of me to be gained, though."

Jack gathered his thoughts. What was it about, really?

"Some man died on the other side of the world. His legacy is a handful of video recordings of sessions between him and Lecter, in the seventies."

"You got your hand on them?"

"More exactly, someone put them under my hand."

"You could have moved it away. It is your hand, Jack. "

"Has he ever made it that simple?"

"Is he the one that has put them under your hand?"

"Everything that is about him is from him. Somehow. Everything."

Alana had nothing to add to that fact she was also fully aware of.

"I tried to ignore their existence," Jack argued. "But it was a losing battle. Even when I wasn't looking at it, it was looking back at me. I just wish to be over with it."

"I see... You decided to watch them tonight? You're done?"

"I've only watched one. There are a few left."

"How..."

Jack could tell Alana wasn't sure she wanted to ask the question for she wasn't sure she wanted to get an answer, but she ended up giving in.

"How was he?"

"I didn't see much of him. Did he ever tell you anything about his family? You knew him from before me, didn't you?"

"Yes, he was my mentor at Hopkins. We had an unequal relationship. I would tell him all about my anxieties and weaknesses, and I never expected anything from him in response. He was unreal in the ways teachers seem to be. For me, when he was leaving the amphitheater, he was disappearing out of existence. We became friends after my graduation but I think I was already biased and expecting him to be without substance or reality of his own. He was what he was for me, before being someone by himself."

"And when you began to know him as a lover?"

Maybe it was inconsiderate. Or maybe even cruel. Both Alana and Jack had very little sensitivity left to cruelty. Too much scar tissue to feel anything.

"He remained what he was before. Exactly what I needed him to be. I think he took pleasure in tailoring himself for me. He likes shallowness, I believe. He finds some irony in it. Laughs at the hideous depths it hides. He never really talked about himself. And when he did it was

always about his present, not his past. But, you know him, he was doing it in such a way that I did not realize it. I never wondered about it. I always figured his parents must still be living in his native country. We never reached the stage where it was relevant for me to know them."

"And a sister?"

"A sister? No, never. Hannibal has a sister?"

This time, Alana was genuinely surprised. Not quite enough to overthrow her exhaustion but she had not expected what Jack had just said. Therefore, he elaborated.

"There were two other people in the video. His uncle and aunt. Apparently, it was a month or so after they welcomed him into their home. Something happened to the parents, and they had been looking for the children. If they ever find the sister, it wasn't right away as, in the video, they were still looking for her and hoping Lecter could help."

"And was he helping?"

"He wasn't speaking."

"He was refusing to answer the questions?"

"No, he wasn't speaking at all. They were talking about catatonia. He was just sitting still, not reacting to anything happening in the room."

"He was able to sit?"

"Yes. And to stand and walk. But he was very... slow but also... delayed if that makes sense."

"It does..."

The silence that followed was heavy with reflection and Jack questioned Alana on it.

"What are you thinking about?"

"I don't know, Jack..."

"What don't you know?"

This time again, Alana let the silence settle but Jack could tell she was simply unsure she truly wanted to answer.

"Jack," she finally said in a breathy tone. "We both guessed it. The whole world guessed it."

"What did we guess?"

"That something really fucked up had to have happened for something like Hannibal Lecter to be born. Whatever the causes of that catatonia, it will be ugly and abject. We don't know but we can guess that, at some point, some place, he had to suffer horribly to become who he is but..."

He could nearly see her bite her lips on the other side of the call, but it was a cold and unwavering voice that Jack finally heard.

"... But I will never feel sorry for him. I don't care about excuses. And I don't care about explanations. He is beyond them, Jack."

"I know. I'm not looking for that either."

"What are you looking for?"

"Peace if only it was possible. At least, one less doubt. Once it is done, my email box and my life will both be one unread message lighter."

Alana thought on his answer, and, though she would have certainly deleted the message altogether, Jack knew she could understand him.

"What did you feel when you saw him?" she finally asked. "What did he inspire in you?"

"No pity," he answered without a shadow of a doubt. "No empathy either."

"Then what?"

"The worrying urge to smother him. To crush him to prevent him from growing. You know, that first primal instinct when you see a spider climbing the wall, on the periphery of your sight. The need to smash at once. Something in the characteristic way the eight legs move just calls for such an immediate response. There is just something in the concept of Hannibal Lecter, no matter his age or appearance, something in the mere idea that calls for violence. He

was standing there, Alana. So very small. So very pathetic. Yet I wanted to do nothing more than to destroy him. What does that tell you about me, Doctor Bloom?"

"It tells me that you learn from your lessons. You know better."

"Violence is the solution?"

"Violence is the only solution Hannibal leaves us. Purposefully. But we both know he cannot be beaten at his own game. It is pointless to try to find another way out that the one he envisioned for us. You need to hold on to that violence Jack."

"Is that your professional advice?"

"Have you heard of the apologists?"

Jack groaned. He had hoped that Lecter would be different. That, for once, humanity as a whole would show some basic common sense. But no. Just like any other serial killer, there had been people to defend him. People to love him also. Hidden forums dedicated to his glory, marriage proposals sent in the wind, tributes of flesh and blood. Lust and veneration following the rumor of him. Nothing was unforgivable. Nothing was unlovable. Much to Jack's bitter hatred for the rest of humankind.

"Yes, I've heard about them. Him too. Can't find anything unredeemable, can they?"

"What would they think if they were to see those videos?"

"How cruel the world is. How defensible the monster is. They would see pain and tragedy and would feel for him instead of the pain and tragedy of his hundreds of victims."

"Yet you don't feel his pain and tragedy? Do you?"

"No. I see them. I understand what I am told of them. I don't feel the first shit about them."

"In this case, Jack, your anger and your violence will help you to find your way. It may be the consequence of Hannibal, it does not come from him. As a matter of fact, he would be incapable of such feelings. Hold on to wrath and you will keep a clear sight. I strongly believe that Hannibal can only be seen accurately through eyes of fear and rage."

"Would you have thought something like that, five years ago?"

"Probably not. But Hannibal made me realize that what I once thought to be horrific was actually very tepid."

"Yes, I guess I have a similar feeling about this whole thing."

For a moment, the two old colleagues remained silent, each on their own side of the phone, understanding the only true link between them.

"I should go back," Jack finally sighed. "It's starting to rain."

"If you need, tonight you can contact me via this number. Tonight only, Jack. One last evening."

"Thank you, Alana."

"Keep in mind you can always walk out."

"I'll try."

Jack slipped his phone in his pocket and walked back into the building in front of him. He left his coat on one of the chairs of the waiting room, in a fashion that Lecter would have considered rude, took his computer and walked into the main room of the practice. He didn't let his eyes get lost on the walls of books, nor on the long grey and red curtains. He ignored the two leather armchairs facing each other and went straight to the desk where he put his computer down. He never had much patience for decorum. And showing such little care for the emotional weight of this place was as far from Hannibal as he could possibly stand.

Once sat, he opened his laptop and started the second video.

LecterHannibal_19dec1976

It was showing the same office, under a darker, more wintry light. Not much had changed in the settings apart from the fact that the boy was now sitting alone in front of the desk. Even without the adults by his side, he seemed particularly small and frail. However, this time, he was holding his head and letting sunlight reach his face. An instinctive horror clenched Jack's heart and, once again, he had to force himself not to reach out to crush the fragile bones of that child.

Will's words about the Chesapeake Ripper came back to him.

'I see him as one of those pitiful things sometimes born in hospital. They feed it, keep it warm but they don't put it on the machines. They let it die. But he doesn't die. He looks normal. And

nobody can tell what he is.'

Jack could. It had taken death and suffering, but now, as he was finally detailing that juvenile face, he knew for certain he could.

Hannibal as a child was not so dissimilar to who he was as an adult. Severe scragginess was exacerbating a face naturally harsh, without any baby fat to round it in that adorable way that nature had chosen to make children loveable for the adults of their species. Nothing in that specific boy would urge anyone to get out of their way to ensure his survival.

His big reddish eyes seemed to eat most of his face, and an unsettling lack of expression was smoothing the pale skin of the forehead. The boy was dressed in a cream knitted pullover and dark pants. On his wrist was shining the kind of watch telling of a certain financial ease, especially on such a young arm. The hair had grown and was now long enough to have been carefully slicked back by a loving hand.

"I've been told that much progress took place since the last time we've spoken, Hannibal."

It was Rufin who had said that sentence but it had voiced Jack's thoughts too. Apart from holding his head, the boy was also indubitably aware of his environment. His eyes, though slow, were following the motions of the Doctor seated in front of him, and his eyebrows would sometimes frown with an indifferent and detached understanding. As a matter of fact, his face was not any less expressive than it would end up being during adulthood. Simply his careful words were not there yet to dissipate any awkwardness.

At least, that was what Jack guessed from the silence that followed the sentence.

"Your aunt told me you've settled quite nicely. How do you like it, living with your aunt and uncle?"

The boy didn't answer, his intense gaze unwavering, his hands perfectly still on his lap.

"I've been told you're eating a bit more? Apparently, you're helping the cook? That's very good, Hannibal. If cooking makes you more interested in eating, then it is a passion you should pursue."

The boy's eyes had left the good Doctor and were now traveling around the office, searching for something.

Though he was still as silent, he was a world away from the immobile figure that had sat between Mr and Mrs Lecter in the first video.

"I've been told you've been playing a bit of music, lately, and reading a lot of books. Very advanced ones. Your uncle told me you've always been quite the clever boy. What do you like to read about, Hannibal?"

The eyes of the boy had stopped on something on the desk, out of the frame of the camera. Yet, Jack had a small suspicion about what he could be. During the silence that followed the Doctor's question, he distinctly began to notice a dry, repetitive noise ticking away. He didn't know why but he was almost certain it was also what had attracted the attention of the boy.

"You know what that is?" Rufin asked.

The boy didn't react, his eyes still on whatever object it could be, his disciplined hands doing no gesture to touch it, unlike what most children his age would have done.

"It is a metronome I only use in very specific circumstances."

So it hadn't been a watch that had produced that steady background sound Jack could hear during the moment of silence. Or if it was, then it wasn't what the boy had been looking at.

"Something about the repetitive sound and motion can help some patients access memories they normally can't have access to."

This time, the boy's eyes left the metronome to meet the Doctor's face. It was indubitable that he was understanding everything that was being said to him, despite his mild

reactions to his environment.

"You think you may have some memories you have trouble accessing, Hannibal?"

The boy didn't move, all his focus now on the Doctor, his chin falling slightly on his chest as if to bring his thoughts closer to the center of his body.

"Your uncle told me he is not quite sure you truly remember anything about your sister. He says you're having terrible nightmares and bed-wetting episodes. That you scream her name during the night and you're biting your tongue and scratching your pillows. But as soon as you wake up, you seem to forget all about it in an instant. He says he sees nothing of that during the day. Only at night."

The Doctor marked a moment of silence but if he was hoping to see anything on the small face, he had to be gravely disappointed. All that the boy was showing was attention. Nothing more.

"It is not rare that the brain lets the unconscious access thoughts and memories it denies to the conscious, because it doesn't think the conscious is able to bear them. It is a defensive mechanism. Like parents who don't say everything to their children to protect them. Sometimes, something terrible happens to someone, and the brain keeps it buried very deep to not have to think about it. But nothing can be truly hidden, Hannibal. And no matter how hard the brain tries to hide it, it will transpire in some ways. It can be through nightmares. Sudden fears. Or sometimes visions. I've been told you're having absences. Sometimes you will stop moving or doing anything for a few seconds before resuming. I think it may not be absences. You could be very present but simply looking at something your aunt and uncle can't see."

Much like Rufin was probably doing, Jack screened the boy's face, trying to see any recognition and realization. But there was nothing happening there.

"When those nightmares, those absences, that distress are too present in someone's life, it means that maybe keeping it buried is not the solution. It is then always delicate because what is buried can't be ignored, but it can still be very dangerous if it is discovered. But we can dialogue with the brain. We can try, poke around, and see how it all makes us feel. Maybe we will discover that we are not ready for those memories. That the stress that comes with

not knowing is better than knowing. Or maybe we will learn that, though it is painful, it is better to be aware. In any case, there is much that can be learned from investigating. If it is something you want, Hannibal, I can help you try to access those memories. If you feel ready for it, it may be of tremendous help for your sister but also for yourself."

The boy didn't react to the mention of his sister. He simply watched.

"Do you want to try, Hannibal?"

Jack didn't know if continuing to ask questions when it was so obvious no answer would come was a psychiatric technique but in any case it brought nothing more than the results that could be expected: silence.

"You can touch it, if you want. It's not forbidden."

Slowly, the boy reached a hand toward the object, yet his eyes stayed carefully in Rufin's as if detailing the reaction his motion would bring. He didn't seem hesitant, yet he appeared to be ready to bring his hand back to him at any moment. But the Doctor didn't change his mind and the boy was finally able to grab the object and bring it in frame, where Jack could see it. It was a big black metronome, with a immobile pendulum, which told Jack that the continuous ticking was indeed coming from somewhere else.

The boy turned it under the light, observing the pendulum and the way gravity was naturally affecting it.

"You can put it down on the desk, if you want. Just there in front of you."

With the same slowness with which he had picked it up, the boy put it down in the middle of the desk. Rufin opened a drawer somewhere behind him and put down a pad and a pen next to the metronome.

"Your uncle told me you knew how to write. You used that method a couple of times to communicate. That's a very good thing. If you feel like writing, even just a word or two, don't hesitate."

The boy didn't reach for the pen. Instead, he detailed the metronome. Rufin leaned forward, his hands placing the weight and, soon after, Jack could hear a new ticking, louder, lower, completely erasing the one he had heard before that.

"Follow the pendulum, Hannibal. Follow it carefully. Watch it swing. And while you watch it swing, and swing, you will listen to its sound and the sound of my voice. Nothing else matters, right now. Whatever you may have in mind, it can wait. The metronome and my voice. That's what matters."

The large dark eyes were swinging left and right, following the motions of the pendulum.

"While you watch the metronome and while you hear my voice, you will enter a wakeful sleep. I won't ask you to speak. You don't have to use any words. You can nod if you want, and you can write down. If you don't want to answer, or if you feel like you can't, it is fine. If you answer in your head, you are already doing all of the important work. Watch the metronome, listen to my voice, and be mindful of your thoughts."

The repetitive sound of the metronome was indeed mind numbing on its own, but its effect didn't reach Jack's brain, made alert and tense by the sight of the boy on the screen. Alana was right, he couldn't be lulled into calmness anymore, and maybe it was a good thing.

"You're having nightmares during the night. Think about them. Try to remember what they are about. You see your sister, don't you?"

The boy didn't answer, didn't nod either. His eyes were swinging dutifully but Jack wasn't sure the sight was reaching his brain.

It was something else that the boy had in common with his future self. A distance between his eyes and his mind, often translated by a delay between the world's actions and Lecter's reactions. As if there was no natural path, no wide lane connecting the outside world to the depth of the Ripper's mind.

The boy was looking at the metronome. And certainly, he was seeing it. But Jack didn't think any of his numerous thoughts were on it.

"When you think about those nightmares, Hannibal, what do you see? Can you write it down? Anything you may remember. An object, a sensation. What do you see when you dream, Hannibal?"

While his eyes were still swinging, the boy picked up the pen and wrote something down. It remained out of Jack's sight but the Doctor leaned forward to read it.

"Her baby teeth? Nothing else? Where are her baby teeth, Hannibal? In her mouth?"

The boy wrote two new words, nothing more, and he carefully put the pen back on the table, though his eyes were still on the pendulum.

"A stool pit? What... What are they doing there?"

For a moment, the boy didn't do anything else. He simply watched the metronome as he had been told. But after a while, he picked up the pen and wrote another few words.

"What clock are you talking about?"

As soon as the question had been asked, and with a vivacity they hadn't shown up until then, Hannibal's eyes snapped at once, darting toward something in front of him. Jack barely prevented a nervous thrill and even Rufin turned around to see what had attracted the boy's gaze.

"No, Hannibal. You can't open it up. I need it to know what time it is."

If the boy was disappointed, he didn't show it though his gaze didn't come back to the metronome. He was seemingly done with the little game.

The rest of the video was more of Rufin's unanswered questions, trying to get the boy to refocus on the metronome or to tell more about his nightmares, but nothing led to any

satisfactory result. The more he was being asked, the less the boy was telling and, by the end of the session, he seemed nearly as lethargic as he had been during the first meeting. Rufin finally recognized that there was nothing more to be done and he put an end to the encounter, not without giving the boy a lollipop from one of his drawers before he could leave his office.

Once left alone with his reflection on the dark screen, Jack hesitated to call Alana right away. But he thought against it. What did he have to say, after all?

That Hannibal had a sister who he dreamed of every night? That it already wasn't more important to him than a clock ticking in the background? Jack didn't know what to think of what he had just seen. Even if he was to put aside his feelings for the boy, it was still enough to leave him puzzled. He had years of experience and a unique insight into Hannibal's psyche that Rufin didn't have the luxury to gain, yet he had no idea what was going on behind those dark eyes. Even as a child Lecter was a complete and absurd mystery. Did he truly repress memories or was he simply playing with the Doctor? Did he even care about his sister? Was the lethargy that had followed the questions a result of boredom or a defensive reflex?

If he had to guess, the boy he was observing was already every bit the monster Jack had come to know. That being said, it was obvious the young soul didn't have all the means nor all the strength his older self would come to develop.

Jack inevitably began to wonder if anything, at that point, could have been done to prevent the boy from growing into the man he would meet decades later. Something other than euthanasia. If that psyche could have been pieced together in a somewhat coherent and functional form.

Jack didn't believe so. He was watching that boy, and he was trying to picture what kind of love that creature could inspire in Mrs and Mr Lecter's heart, what kind of humanity it had been coming from. If indeed everything that had made Hannibal was encapsulated in those repressed memories and nightmares, the question for Jack was not so much what those memories and nightmares were but rather what could have possibly existed prior to them.

On the other hand, he was relieved that the videos he was now watching was so clearly of a Hannibal who was already upsettingly fucked up.

He didn't think he could have stomached the sight of a human, loveable child. An innocent, unscathed one. That would have been the true tragedy. Not in the scars around the thin neck nor the weight behind the juvenile eyes. The tragedy was not in what was broken, but in what was still intact. In what could have been grandiose, while it still had a chance.

There was no point in calling Alana, Jack decided. There was nothing he wanted to share and nothing he wanted to hear about. Instead, he simply started a new video. Three would be left after this one. Half of the file still, yet Jack already felt exhausted.

LecterHannibal_24avr1977

Same office. Same boy.

A bit older maybe, but not by much. Most likely, he had gained in weight and height more than he had gained in age. The boy looked healthier. It was visible that he was now eating, and maybe getting some physical activity done as his shoulders were nowhere as frail as they had been in the last video.

The windows of the office were opened, suggesting a warmer season, and the boy's hair, now long enough to be tucked behind his ears, were gently floating with the breeze.

He was sitting by the desk, as usual, but this time he was slightly leaning over it. Jack first thought he may have been writing but the speed of the small hands made him wonder if he was not drawing instead.

Rufin was there too, though not in his usual armchair. Instead, he had taken a seat by Hannibal's side and was leaning toward the drawing as well, though his eyes were clearly on the boy.

"I spoke with your uncle while you were in the waiting room," he began. "He told me what happened in school. You want to tell me about it yourself? Your perspective on it?"

When no one was speaking, the microphone could pick up softer noises and this time it was the scratching of pen on paper that was accompanying the conversation.

"I think we have to talk about it. It was very violent."

Whether or not the boy thought it was violent, he continued to draw, his eyebrows frowned in concentration.

"Apparently, the other boy was a bully. But it is no reason. No matter what he did, it doesn't change what you did. You broke his coccyx and nose, Hannibal. It was your second day."

The boy's hand slowed down, working on a curve with care and precaution.

"Why did you do that?"

His drawing was taking too much of his attention for him to even raise his head.

"You see, you're not the first boy I received here. And others have trouble interacting with the other children, just like you. It's not that unusual. That being said, I noticed something with the years. A child does not inherently know such extreme violence. They have always seen it somewhere before. A violent child is often a sign of violent parents."

The hand continued to slow down until it nearly stopped, the boy's guarded eyes gradually rising from the drawing to meet the Doctor's gaze.

"I know that you love your aunt and uncle very much," Rufin quickly added. "I noticed how attached you've become. And I have no doubt that they are both very kind to you."

The eyes fell back, and the boy resumed his drawing.

"Which makes me wonder where you could have witnessed it. Where did you learn that pushing around and hitting were possible reactions to frustration?"

The focus of the boy was gone. It had been short lived, now it was back on his drawing.

"You have seen that somewhere before, Hannibal? You have been pushed around and hit? By older people, maybe? If so, you can say so. No matter the reasons you think they had, they were wrong. And if that ever happened to you, you bear no blame at all."

But the boy didn't react. Jack didn't know to what extent Lecter had known violence as a child, but he was certain that, in that moment, the boy cared as little about it as him.

"When you were brought to the hospital by your uncle, you were covered in bruises. Do you still remember where they were coming from?"

The boy was back to wide strokes of his wrist, darkening entire portions of his drawing.

"And the scars?"

Jack didn't know if Lecter had any scar today. Apart from the ones he had received from the Admirer. He had wanted to ask Alana about it, but it sounded inconsiderate. He preferred to remain ignorant than to remind Alana of the physical intimacy she had shared with the Ripper. In more ways than one, it was worse than their emotional intimacy as everyone had been emotionally intimate with Hannibal – though the other way around hadn't been true, except maybe for Will. To remind her of his body and her willing vulnerability to it was the kind of viciousness only Hannibal would enjoy.

"Your uncle has decided to pull you out of school. You will be taught by Lady Murasaki along with her other student. How do you feel about that? I've heard the both of you have grown very close to each other."

Jack had no idea who Lady Murasaki could be, and for a moment, he wondered if she had any connection to Sheba Lecter.

"And how do you and Chiyoh get along?"

In the face of the absence of answers, Rufin leaned back into his armchair and pensively stroked his beard. It was the first time Jack could see him clearly and he appeared to be a man well in his forties, with a shirt that indicated, by its undone button and its rolled up sleeves, that it belonged to a man who could show a more relaxed figure.

"Your aunt told me something else," he said after a while, certainly searching for a new angle to try. "She said you sometimes speak to her."

Nothing disrupted the perfect regularity of Hannibal's hand. In some ways, it reminded Jack of the pendulum. The child was quick to learn and natural at copying. Useful quality when one was walking among a foreign species.

"A couple of words. Nothing more. Yet you speak."

Rufin continued to stroke his beard, waiting for his thoughts more than for an answer.

"Some people believe that what is in one's head is not real. That if mutism is psychological, it means that it is as easy as not wanting to speak. It is not. Sometimes there is nothing wrong physically, but the brain won't have us speak. And if that is the case, it is as well as being physically unable to speak. Yet I don't think it is your case, Hannibal."

Rufin looked at the boy with intensity, certainly trying to catch any reaction. He got none.

"You want to know what I think?"

Scratching answered and Rufin continued.

"I think you are a very clever boy, Hannibal. I think you are perfectly aware of a lot of things, and you have an unsuspected understanding of how everything functions. When I told your uncle about the clock you wanted to open up, he told me you were very educated about their inner workings. I firmly believe it is true for a lot more than just clocks."

Rufin leaned forward once again.

"I think a boy as clever as you would easily guess what would happen if he were to speak again. Wouldn't you agree?"

Scratching. Nothing more.

"Here's what I believe. I believe you are able to speak. You have been for... what... a month or so, maybe? And I believe you are perfectly aware of it. But I think I know what may have come through your brain when you began to realize that. You know very well that, at the moment you start speaking again, people will want to hear what you have to say. They will start to expect answers to their questions. Now, I don't think you care much about me. Or the judge. Or your schoolmates. But your uncle and your aunt..."

Rufin let the words in suspension for a second before finishing his thought and his sentence.

"You don't want to speak again because you know what you have to say will hurt Robertus Lecter."

The boy's hand was working on smaller details. Finishing touches.

"They are dead and you know it well."

Rufin's finishing touch.

Both the boy and the psychiatrist met each other's eyes.

"Hannibal, he is searching for them. He needs to know."

The boy didn't say a word, but the Doctor had become quite good at guessing his silences.

"You know that, don't you?"

The boy's eyes were still. Expecting.

"Hannibal, do you remember what happened to your parents?"

Jack fully expected the usual lack of answer, yet the boy nodded. Slowly. Tediously. And Jack wondered if he had truly seen more than a vague and sluggish hiccup.

"And to your sister?"

The boy shook his head.

"But you know they are all dead."

The boy didn't move. But the intensity in his perfectly still eyes answered for him.

"It is not that they are dead, is it? It is how they died. You don't want him to know what you know."

Jack couldn't have expected such empathy from Lecter. But before he could wonder about it, Rufin continued.

"Your uncle needs to know. He is looking for them. Desperately. He is in pain, Hannibal."

The boy lowered his head and, for a second, Jack was reminded of the catatonic boy sitting between the two adults, in the first video. But Rufin didn't let it settle and continued at once.

"I have an offer for you, Hannibal."

The boy frowned again, finally showing for his psychiatrist a focus he had so far only shown for his drawing.

"I will tell your uncle. Kindly. I will let him know that he will never see his brother again. And that there is no point in continuing his research. I will also let him know my professional opinion about you. That I don't believe it would do you any good to be interrogated about it. That you will remember at your own pace, if you remember at all, and that forcing you could have disastrous consequences. Your uncle will know what he needs to know. And nothing more. In exchange, Hannibal, I want you to begin to speak again. Do we have a deal?"

The boy simply stared but the Doctor must have seen it as a form of approval for he leaned back with a pensive sigh.

Then the boy spoke.

A creak. Metallic and raspy. Unnatural in ways that the ear could detect and hate at once.

Compressed air passing through a throat that should have never been used.

Jack was so deeply distracted by the unsettling and worrying mistake that was that sound that he missed the subtitles, and his bits of French didn't allow him to catch the meaning of the few words that had been said.

Rufin, however, had caught it. And it was obvious he was forcing himself not to react to the awaited voice to focus on what it was communicating.

"Why would you believe that, Hannibal?"

The sound resonated again, and Jack quickly muted his computer, his beating heart rushing his blood toward his head, crashing it against his ear to deafen them. Spared from the disquieting and ominous creaking sound, he forced his mind to focus on the subtitles.

"I know."

"What?"

"I don't believe. I know."

"Your uncle loves you. He would never regret finding you. And if he will need time to grieve Mischa, he will never think that. He would never believe that he would rather have your sister than you."

"Because he doesn't know better."

Jack had to force his gaze down, sticking to the white words appearing. He didn't want to see this mouth move. Not after all the damages it had done. Which also meant he couldn't see Rufin's face.

"I must say it. I don't think what you're saying is true, Hannibal. But still, if it is true for you, I would like to know why. Why do you think that? Is it guilt?"

"It is empathy."

"For your sister?"

"For whomever survived her."

Rufin tried to interrogate the boy furthermore, tried to find the source of this thought, but he didn't get a single word after that. The boy had said what he had to say and had settled back in his silence. To Jack's relief.

The memory of Hannibal's words was still too burning inside his mind. Having inflicted wounds too deep to be mended.

Up until the end, it had remained the Ripper's sharpest blade, and his most deadly one. Poisoned in ways his scalpel had never been.

Cursed be the day the child had spoken.

Cursed be Rufin and cursed be that world that had let this boy cling to life.

Once again faced with his reflection, Jack leaned against the leather back of Lecter's armchair.

There was more to see here than a session and more to hear than a creaking voice.

Jack couldn't help but think back on Rufin's words. When he had tried to guess why the boy didn't speak, he had blamed the need to protect the uncle. Hannibal had kept quiet to prevent harm and to avert his uncle's eyes from the horror he had seen himself.

Yet, it was very unlike Lecter. Hannibal was a monster of gloating and laughing. He was craving for a distinguished form of sadism, his twisting mind seeking perfectly tailored torture with irony and poetry.

Confronting his uncle to the truth that he was so desperate for, even though that truth was unbearable, was exactly the kind of sarcasm that would get a pleased smile out of the monster. The Hannibal he knew wouldn't have even bat an eye.

Yet this Hannibal had done more than bat. He had held back. What was more, he hadn't seemed to find any joy in the perspective of his uncle's suffering.

It wasn't simply because of love. After all, Hannibal had loved Will and oh had he made him suffer. But that boy didn't love in the same way the man did. Something here was purer. Kinder.

And Jack didn't know what to make of it.

Absent-mindedly, his fingers began to tap on his phone's screen and, before he could notice it, he had dialed Alana's temporary number.

"Yes?"

Jack didn't waste a second before sharing what was on his mind.

"He didn't do as much harm as he could have done. Why?"

"I'm sorry, Jack, but I'll need a bit more context here."

Jack breathed in and organized his thoughts.

"When he was a child. He has been adopted by his uncle, who brought him to France but who continued to search for the rest of the family. The parents and the sister. He was looking for them. He thought Hannibal could help him but Hannibal didn't remember anything and he didn't talk anyway. But Rufin - the psychiatrist - in the last video he said that he didn't believe it was true."

"Hannibal faked?"

"Not exactly. He said that he thought Lecter truly didn't remember and couldn't talk at first. But then he continued to not speak not out of lack of means but to not have to tell what had happened. Turned out Lecter remembered what had happened to the parents but didn't want to let the uncle know."

"He wanted the uncle to keep searching?"

"No, that's the thing. He didn't want him to keep searching. But he didn't want him to know exactly what had happened. He wanted... I think he wanted to protect him. To spare him some harm. But that doesn't sound like the Lecter I know."

For a moment, Alana remained quiet. She was certainly trying to simply make sense of Jack's words, as she hadn't seen any of the videos. Therefore, Jack took it upon himself to clarify.

"He was exactly like he is now, Alana. He is very recognizable. He had the same way of looking at you, of thinking of something else, of building bridges between tragedies and mundanity. He was already everything that makes him him today. Yet..."

"... He didn't rejoice in the pain of a loved one."

"Why is everything else the same but that?"

"I don't know, Jack. I..."

She hesitated for a second before starting a whole new sentence.

"The more years pass by, the wiser I get, and the more I start to believe that those who get the closest to understand Hannibal are those who admit he is beyond comprehension."

"Will understood him."

"Will was beyond our comprehension."

Alana had said that last sentence in a cold, harsh voice that left nothing up for discussion. Jack knew it was a sensitive point. It was one even for him. But Alana was among those who believed that Will was still alive. Somewhere. By Hannibal's side.

Jack didn't want to hear about it. He didn't like how logical it sounded. Therefore, he didn't mind dropping the subject.

"What happened to the uncle?" Alana asked.

"I don't know. He should be about eighty today. He could still be alive."

"If he was dead, that could explain why Hannibal changed his mind on how to love others. Did he seem to be decent?"

"Who? The uncle?"

"Yes."

"I believe so, yes."

"How old is he in the videos? Hannibal."

"The date says 1977."

"So... thirteen? Fourteen? If the birthdate we have is the correct one. You are still watching someone who is growing up, Jack. No matter how inhuman he already was, he was still developing and learning about himself. I... wouldn't have thought he could want to spare

someone. I can't tell you why he changed his definition of love. But you are bound to find differences."

"Less and less as time passes."

"Less and less indeed."

Silence settled and Jack thought back on the boy's silences. He sighed. That was the thing with Lecter. He was so quick to fill the empty spaces, that he was becoming omnipresent before anyone could notice.

From now on, silences would remind Jack of Hannibal, and how the hell could he escape that?

"Are you learning anything Jack? Is it all worth it?"

"Hannibal will never be worth it," Jack answered at once.

The second question took him just a bit more time.

"Yes, I am learning."

"What are you learning?"

"That there were people blinder than us. With fewer excuses. That I don't have the pathological empathy required to understand the first thing about that man. And that it is all much more mundane than I would have thought."

"More mundane?"

"We always speak of God and the Devil, Alana. We use theological terminology to describe him and we only mention him through the great allegories of literature and philosophy. Have you never thought he could be... banal? Worldly. A clever kid, to whom happened fucked up shits, so he grew up in a fucked up way?"

"That's what you believe?"

"I've seen Hannibal as a figure of myth. When I dream of him, I dream of vestigial wings and infernal thrones. What if... What if he is just the unlikely meeting between exceptional nature and calamitous nurture. Just an insanely clever kid, who could have become Mozart or Galilei, but who was screwed up at some point and became the genius equivalent in madness.

Nothing to do with God or any higher form of existence. No conceptual poetry, there. Just a damn unlucky hiccup of the universe. A worldly mistake."

Alana didn't say much at first. Simply welcoming his words. Then she sighed. It was often the most eloquent answer when it came to Hannibal.

"I don't know, Jack."

"You've thought about it?"

"Maybe but... it doesn't matter."

"It should."

"Maybe it should. But the truth is... Maybe he is but a mistake. An odd among others. Very human. Very banal. Maybe there is nothing spiritual about him. But that doesn't change the fact that the destruction he brought upon our lives had biblical proportions."

"So he may be no Devil, he is enough of a Devil for us for it to be his truth..."

"By admitting it, I don't think I'm giving him any power he doesn't already have."

"I fucking hate the living shit out of him..."

"Yet another commonality between him and God. Human laws and human hatred have no impact on him. When humanity turned its back on God, He didn't stop existing. He simply flooded it and went on with His day."

Jack couldn't deny that it did sound like a Hannibal thing to do indeed. Alana was right. It didn't matter whether or not Hannibal had anything to do with God. He had a matching power and a matching irony. From their perspective, it was exactly the same.

"I am going to continue watching," Jack said.

"You don't have to," Alana felt compelled to say.

"I know. If I call, will you answer?"

"Yes. Tonight only."

"Thank you, Alana."

Jack let her hang up and he put his phone down on the desk.

Three videos left to go. He clicked on the next one.

LecterHannibal_13oct1977

Same office. Same windows. Same books. Same sky.

The rain was a new element, however.

The boy had grown up. He looked more and more like a young man now though he was not there yet. Sturdy shoulders and pleasant face. The kind that had to have been the first crush of many schoolmates. He had lips that could accommodate a large variety of smiles.

He was wearing a dark blue shirt and a sober waistcoat. Closer to the kind of garments he would wear as an adult but there was something tepid in them. Restrained.

He had lips that could smile, yet he wasn't smiling.

He was looking at the windows. His dark eyes, that never seemed to focus on what they should, were detailing the droplets dripping along the glass.

"How are you doing, Hannibal?"

That was what Jack read and he realized he hadn't turned the sound back on. He hesitated a second before pressing the shortcut button on his keyboard.

When Lecter talked, it was with a human voice. Soft, light, more breathy than what could have been expected. But human nonetheless. Masks back on, it would seem.

Jack wasn't sure what was worse.

"It is a very common question," the boy said. "How are you doing."

"It is."

"Reserved for conversation openings. And for you. Lately, everyone has given it a go."

"And what has your answer been?"

"Variations around the same theme. At least I am alive."

It was strange to witness conversion at last. It was even stranger to hear Lecter's words and Lecter's thoughts coming from such young lips. If any denial could have been allowed before, now was too late. It was indeed Hannibal's early self that Jack was spying on.

"They all want to show support in any way they can. One of those ways, maybe an ill-advised one, is to worry for you."

"They truly shouldn't. Though, I made sure to thank them for their good thoughts and kind heart."

It was exactly the kind of sentence Lecter would find some pleasure in saying. Something about its shallowness would have amused him. The boy didn't seem amused.

"Losing someone, especially so suddenly, always reminds us of some old wounds we left open. To not be able to have a last goodbye, to be reminded of the uncertainty of life, it often makes us think back on all the goodbyes we missed and all the certainties we lost."

"My sister again?" the young man said without looking away from the window.

"Not necessarily."

There was a moment of silence but something in its fabric had changed compared to the other videos. The possibility that it could be filled and shattered at every moment. Lecter was now a part of the conversation, and it was weighing down the very air in the office.

"Did that bring anything new on your sister? Any reminiscence?"

The young man's eyes left the windows for a second before going back. He slowly shook his head.

"It will come," Rufin said.

"Certainly."

"How is your aunt doing?"

Lecter slowly breathed in and out.

"As well as we could expect. Lady Murasaki has a strong soul. She is tired, however. She doesn't want to speak but she has no other choice. I've tried to speak for her. At the door of the church. The parade of handshakes and condolences. I wanted to alleviate her load. Carry a bit of her exhaustion on my shoulders."

"That is kind of you."

"It is only fair. She has been doing it for me not so long ago."

The next silence was broken by Hannibal himself. How much he had grown in barely a year...

"The press was at the funerals. Journalists of all kinds, but mostly the lowest ones. The death of a major artist. Lady Murasaki had nothing to tell them. But she tried to keep me away from them."

"You wanted to talk to them?"

"No but they wanted pictures."

"She was trying to shelter you. She doesn't want that attention on you right now."

"She is expecting a fragile grief from me."

"And that is not what it is?"

"It is not fragile."

Rufin pushed aside whatever notebook he had had in front of him, his focus, whole and careful, on his patient.

"You have cried many deaths, Hannibal. Carried many grieves. It may not feel quite the same to you than what is expected. You must keep in mind that grief doesn't exist for others. The sadness you are experiencing, no matter its nature, is a valid form of sadness."

"I did not."

"Mmh?"

"Cried many deaths. I did not."

"Who didn't you cry?"

"Well... Many people."

The young man thought about it for a moment before saying:

"Christiaan Huygens."

"Christiaan...?"

"Huygens. One of the founders of modern mathematical physics. He died in 1695 and was buried under an unmarked grave in the Grote Kerk. I did not cry him."

"I meant your loved ones."

"I loved him dearly."

Here it was. The wit and the soft superiority. But Rufin was too used to it, or maybe not enough, for he did not mention it.

"Have you cried your parents, Hannibal?"

"I was sad when they died. I am still sad that they are dead."

"You think of them often?"

"There are few topics I rarely think about."

"And do you feel any differently about your uncle?"

Hannibal thought about it, certainly repeating the question in his mind, formulating several answers and picking the best one.

"Uncle Robertus belongs to a period of my life. My parents to another one. Very distinct. I loved them all sincerely. I will miss Uncle Robertus. I will share Lady Murasaki's grief. What is the point behind those questions, Doctor?"

"To get you to talk about what happened, Hannibal. You are speaking again. Fluently and effortlessly. But I don't feel like you're saying a lot."

"What would you have me say?"

"Anything really."

Rufin straightened his back, resting his chin above his crossed hands.

"You have been through an unimaginable amount of pain, Hannibal. May it be physical or psychological. Safety and healing were promised to you, and yesterday you buried your uncle. You have lost everything and yet here you are, losing again. You would be in your good right to feel... well, everything, actually."

"Would you want me to scream?"

"I would understand you screaming."

"I don't think it would do me much good," the young man said pensively.

For a moment, they both left each other on those words, letting only the rain fill up the blanks. After a while, however, Rufin picked up the thread.

"What will you do now?"

"Go home. For now. The lawyer came yesterday. He was so ashamed to intrude upon grief. Poor soul."

"What did he want?"

"The castle will be auctioned. Death duties. Lady Murasaki's resident status may be questioned now."

It was only then that Jack realized that Lady Murasaki and Sheba Lecter were one and the same.

"Where will you go, without the castle?"

"My aunt is thinking some apartment in Paris. I will soon enter the School of Medicine. The one near Odeon. I will probably be able to live there. They have rooms for the students under the rooftops. When you walk out by the front door, you can see the Institute of France through the parallel streets. The Parliament of the Learned World will look up to my window."

"Are you angry about it?"

"I would be angry if it was looking down."

"About them taking your uncle's castle."

Hannibal looked at Rufin with little emotion. No anger there.

"I will get it back. Eventually."

"I'm sure you'll be able to. What matters most is for you to focus on growing up and studying. Everything else can wait. And I am certain your aunt will do anything in her power to provide for your needs."

"I have very little needs."

"But you must tell her about them. Don't keep them for yourself. You may be used to caring for yourself but you must keep in mind that she is there to provide for you."

"I will not forget it."

Hannibal, as Jack had known him, was an expensive man. From his Zenith watch to his Bentley car, Lecter was wearing his money on his sleeve, in the literal sense of the terms. Jack couldn't picture such a man living in any kind of poverty. He knew he had had a different life before his uncle's money, and certainly he had not always been as rich as he had been in Baltimore, yet Jack could more easily picture a young black and blue Hannibal than a cheaply dressed one. Though the situation seemed dire for the grieving family, the reality of poverty didn't seem able to reach someone like Hannibal, at least in Jack's mind.

"What about Paul Momund?" Rufin asked, interrupting Jack's thoughts. "They arrested him?"

"Briefly. They let him go the same day."

"He won't be charged?"

"Uncle Robertus died of a heart attack. Whether or not it was provoked by the fact that he was pushed against the wall doesn't matter. Paul the Butcher may have landed a decisive blow he didn't land the final one."

"So he will just walk away?"

"It would seem."

"How do you feel about that?"

Hannibal had his eyes back on the window, and wasn't facing the lens anymore. Yet Jack could guess the controlled rictus twisting his lips.

"Him being sent to jail wouldn't have brought me any comfort."

He had said that in his soft voice that barely seemed to brush over the words. A voice that seemed tailored for a kindness Hannibal never showed.

Jack knew what those words were saying and what that voice was hiding. It was one of those ominously vague statements that, in Hannibal's mouth, sounded like a death threat. A careful way of keeping honest while foretelling the worst. At that moment, Jack was fully aware of two things. Paul Momund was about to die and Hannibal Lecter was about to be pleased.

"What will be left of your uncle?" Rufin asked, slightly deviating the topic. "Now that he is gone, what is his legacy to you? What place will you make for him in your life?"

Hannibal's eyes narrowed just enough to let the outsider gaze think that some thoughts were being put in that question and Rufin patiently waited for an answer.

"Uncle Robertus has never wished for my gratitude," the teenager finally said. "I am perfectly aware that I owe him my life and, if he had not found me and cared for me, I would have not

lived long past my thirteen."

What a damn hero, Jack thought with bitterness.

"But I don't think living in debt is what he would have wanted. It would make for a poor homage."

"What would make for a good one?"

"I won't remember what he saved but I will remember what he elevated. He taught me how to draw and paint. He taught me how to talk and show kindness. He gifted back some humanity, even though it is a fundamentally different one than the one I had before all that. I will be grateful for that. My life is my own, but the quality of it... I will know whose arms carried me to a home and whose money and attention dressed me up. He is dead and buried, and I will live through my life without him, but I will make sure to save my most tender thoughts for him."

"That is a very wise approach of death, Hannibal."

"I don't think I lack wisdom. And I certainly don't lack practice in approaching death."

Jack feared he was picking up on a double-entendre but, if there was indeed one, Rufin missed it entirely.

"Will this change anything about your parents?"

"An added company?"

"I mean about what happened to them. You didn't want to speak about it for you didn't want your uncle to hear about it. Not fully. But now, your uncle can't be hurt anymore."

"You want to hear about it."

"It is not about me, Hannibal, it is about you."

"Then if it is about me, no, it won't change a thing. I don't feel the need to voice it. Peace has been made and I tidied up these events on the shelves in my mind where they belong. Answering any question about it would do nothing but satisfy others' voyeuristic pleasure. If they want gossip, they can find it anywhere else. Surely you have heard about that execution? The guillotine, still. It is said that it may have been the last guillotine execution France will ever witness. That is gossip worthy. They should aim for that level of shock value, rather than

two isolated souls in a forgotten country of eastern Europe. A man died with grandiose and horrific theatrics. They would do him great insult if they were to turn their eyes away."

"Who is that 'they', Hannibal? Is it me? The judge? Your aunt?"

"My aunt would agree with me on the matter, I believe. If I don't need to talk about it, then there is no need to talk about it."

Rufin's fingers tapped on the desk at the rhythm of his thoughts but finally nodded.

"Then we won't talk about it. That being said, there is something I would like to give you, before we end for today."

"A gift?"

"Of sorts."

Rufin reached into his drawer and handed something to the teenager, though the angle of the camera didn't allow Jack to really discern what it was. Hannibal described it for him however.

"Your clock?"

"It stopped working a week ago. I was offered a new one, but I thought you could have this one."

"Now that it is broken."

"Now that opening it up would do it more good than harm."

"I didn't want to do anything with it. I just wanted to see how it worked. At worst, I would have let a speck of dust fall between the cogs to see how it would fret. Most certainly it would have continued to function through the hardship."

"Well... now there is no point in sabotaging it, but you could repair it if you so wished. That could be a nice-looking clock in your future student room."

"It is nice-looking even when it gives the wrong hour. It can decorate just fine. But I will think about repairs. I will let you know about it."

"Thank you. That will be all for today then. Take care, Hannibal, and good luck with school. I didn't take the time to properly congratulate you. It is quite the feat to have been accepted this

early and I am certain you will do wonders in medicine. I am eager to call you my colleague."

"Thank you, Doctor."

The end of the video found Jack stunned and dizzy. The death of Robertus, though predictable, had happened as suddenly to him as it had happened to Hannibal.

He knew full well that he didn't want to work on the Ripper case anymore, yet, something inside him, that could certainly be called instinct, was thinking and piecing together on its own. Though he wouldn't admit it, he had had some thoughts about trying to find Robertus Lecter. Just for a conversation. See how this kind-hearted man lived with the shadow of his monstrous nephew. Learn about all the early tells that hadn't been captured by the camera.

But now Robertus was no more. He had died ten minutes ago, and all his answers and insights had been buried with him.

That was when he started to think about Lady Murasaki that Jack realized.

He didn't want to work on the Ripper case. He had barely talked in years, ever since Will's disappearance. He hadn't wanted to interact with the world, hadn't wanted to look anyone in the eyes.

When those videos had found him, Jack had been in a state of mental catatonia very similar to the one of that weak, starving boy. His lethargy, born from trauma and powerlessness, had found an echo with the one behind the dark sunken eyes of the future monster. But as the boy had grown out of his mutism and stillness, Jack's mind had done as well, walking on the same path Hannibal had walked decades before him. And here he was, thinking of travel and investigation.

Jack remained perfectly still, afraid that, if he were to move an inch, he would spot in the corner of his eyes the shadow of the teenager, the broken clock in his hands, walking happily toward a future of atrocities.

His hands instinctively reached toward his phone, to call for help, but his shame got the better of him. He didn't want Alana – or anyone – to hear the thoughts he was now having. To see the similitudes he couldn't ignore anymore.

So, instead of calling or backing away, he rushed forward, eager to spot in the next video something that would deviate the narrative.

LecterHannibal_23oct1977

Not much time seemed to have passed this time.

Jack could easily guess that many sessions were missing in between the ones time had preserved, but this time, not even a few weeks seemed to be separating the fourth and the fifth videos. Hannibal's height was the same, and so was his hair. The sky outside was just as grey and frost had replaced rain.

"She is very worried for you, Hannibal."

"She shouldn't be."

"You spent the night in jail."

"I spent a part of the night in an interrogation room. I am one for narrative dramatization but if honesty is the aegis of this session, then honest I will be."

"They said they let you go because someone threw the head in the street while you were being interrogated."

"It is true."

"They said he was horribly mutilated."

"If someone was able to throw his head anywhere, we can guess the body was indeed not intact. Horribly? I wouldn't know. It is a subjective notion. Mutilated, it is for certain."

"More than the head?"

"More than the head."

"How do you know that?"

"The police showed me."

"The body?"

"Yes. The body."

Rufin didn't add anything, and Hannibal turned his head slightly on the right, detailing the Doctor with great care.

"You seem very reproofing."

"I don't think showing you the body was a good idea."

"They wanted a reaction, I suppose."

"They should have asked me first."

"What would you have said?"

"That, with your history, with what you've already been through, I don't think showing you mutilated bodies could be any good. Quite the contrary, actually. You may not have as many nightmares anymore, they could well come back. Without mentioning that you are still a child. You said they wanted a reaction, did they get one?"

"You would need to ask them. They were the ones looking for one."

"What did you feel when you saw the body?"

Hannibal thought about it, certainly trying several words in his head before choosing the good one:

"Detached."

Jack understood at once that it was a pun on the apparently severed head of the body. Rufin missed it completely.

"Have you seen many bodies in your life, Hannibal?"

"A fair amount."

"In what context?"

"My orphanage was a mortuary. Between its walls, rats were healthier than children."

"You survived."

"I am aware."

"You fought with him, didn't you? Paul Momund. Before your uncle did."

"I did, yes."

"Why is that?"

"He insulted Lady Murasaki."

"What did he say to her?"

"That her pussy was running crossway."

"How did she react?"

"With her usual grace."

"How did you react?"

"I pushed him and threw guts at him."

"Guts?"

"Pork. I was reaching for the knife but Lady Murasaki moved it away at once. I made do. Guts were the closest."

"You wanted to hurt him."

"Is the knife making you think that?"

Rufin remained silent and Jack found himself leaning forward, trying to see on the low quality footage the tells the Doctor was currently picking on.

"It is nearly... convenient," he finally said.

"What is, Doctor?"

"Paul Momund insults your aunt, pushes your uncle to his death and, a week later, he is found dead and mutilated. His death coincides exactly with what may have been the cumulation of your wrath against him."

"You saw me last week, Doctor. Did I look wrathful?"

As if it solved the whole point, Hannibal leaned back and crossed his legs.

"Though it is true that his death arrived right on time to punish a major offense. Maybe there is a God after all... That doesn't work so well for me, I have been lenient on my prayers lately. But I am sure He and I will be able to strike an agreement."

"A major offense?"

"Wouldn't you say so?"

"Major indeed. But why singular?"

"I am sure he hurt many people before me. I am simply talking from my perspective."

"When you think of that major offense, what do you have in mind? Your aunt's honor or your uncle's death?"

"You are asking me to choose between the two of them?"

"Not between your aunt and your uncle. But I am simply worried by the fact that you place an insult on the same level, or maybe a higher one, than death."

"My uncle's death was an accident. My aunt's humiliation was deliberate."

That may have been true, but Rufin's comment was just as correct. Hannibal had always placed insults above mutilations, in his order of immorality.

"What does she think of the mutilated body?"

"I don't think she saw it, Doctor."

"But she heard of it."

"Certainly. We live in a very gossipy area. As proven by the fact that you knew all about my marketplace quarrel with Paul the Butcher."

"What does she think about it?"

"I am guessing she is distressed."

"Why that?"

"A mutilated body is rarely a comforting thought. In this neighborhood, can you imagine?"

The teenager was having his fun. Hannibal's signature joy.

"I've heard from the police that the cheeks were missing. On Momund's head."

"Did that make him look any prettier than he was when he had them?"

"You are not taking it seriously, Hannibal, are you?"

"Oh, but I am, Doctor."

"What do you think happened to the cheeks, Hannibal?"

"I guess someone found for them a better use than rotting away."

"And what happened to your sister?"

In the silence, Jack's gasp resonated loudly enough to be heard by the protagonist of the videos.

He could have guessed that, whatever had happened to the sister, it was something linked in some fashion to Hannibal's many sins. But seeing it be thrown so carelessly, so casually, as if it wasn't the genesis of Humanity's biggest mistake, was still striking a Christian fear in Jack he didn't know he could manage.

That being said, thinking about it twice, Jack realized that, maybe, it wasn't the tone with which the question had been asked that was the most unsettling. Maybe, it was simply watching someone trying to outsmart Hannibal. It felt exactly like watching a car crash in slow motion and knowing that, at any moment, the bodies would inevitably be flying through the windshields.

"Are you putting her in relation with Paul?" Hannibal asked.

"I don't know. Are you?"

"I am not."

"Then I suppose they are in no way connected. Speaking of neighborhood, I was visited by an inspector that is not from this one."

"Inspector Popil?"

"That was the name. Do you know him?"

"An unexpected amount of bonding can take place in an interrogation room."

"What did you talk about?"

"Fishing and family. I offered to create an alibi for him, so he wouldn't be accused of Paul's death. He was not interested. What did you talk about?"

"He wanted to ask me questions about you. Our conversations are protected by the law."

"Until I hurt someone."

"Until then. So, we ended up speaking of other matters."

"For example?"

"He was curious about your aunt."

Jack distinctively spotted the curl of Hannibal's lip, between anger and frustration. At least as close to them as someone like Hannibal could get.

"You are not happy about it," Rufin said, having certainly noticed the same thing. "Why?"

"I don't think Inspector Popil is being strictly professional."

"Why do you think he wanted to know about your aunt, then?"

Hannibal didn't answer right away, vexed for a reason Jack didn't understand.

"I guess he just has a curious mind," he finally said.

"What will you do now?"

"About Inspector Popil?"

"Something needs to be done about him?"

"I don't believe so. We are about to move to Paris. I will start school next term. Professor Dumas found me a job of sorts. I may help him at the morgue, preparing the anatomy classes of the next day, against a small salary under the table. It will help Lady Murasaki now that the castle has been sold and the money taken. She has enough for herself, and I think I can cover my own minimal expenses."

"It is a good thing. Responsibility can't be learned too early. Take care however not to exhaust yourself. You are young, and your aunt is still there to help you."

"I will take good care."

"If Inspector Popil were to visit me again, are there matters you would like me to talk about?"

"Whatever matter you feel there are things to be said about. I have no secret, Doctor Rufin."

"I will keep it in mind."

The rest of the conversation went on as a background noise in Jack's mind as he was left wondering how sincere Hannibal was when he was claiming to have no secret.

From Jack's perspective, such statements, in Lecter's case, didn't come from a lack of self-awareness but a complete lack of shame and remorse.

For a moment, he wondered what Hannibal would think if he knew what Jack was currently witnessing. Would he be angered by the lack of privacy? Would he be proud of his younger self's wit and resilience? Or would he simply fondly think back on a time where he only had a couple of skeletons in his closet, as close to innocence as he had ever managed?

Instinctively, without putting much of his head into it, Jack started the sixth and last video.

LecterHannibal_03feb1980

A lot had changed.

Not the office. Not the window. Not the sky.

But Hannibal was now an adult. Or close to it. He was in that strange limbo between the end of adolescence and the beginning of adulthood. A boy no more. Nearly a man.

He was standing in the space in front of the office, his hands behind his back, his eyes on the windows. It was nighttime and the office was lit by dark yellow halos, creating an orange ambiance with the wood of the floor and walls.

Hannibal was wearing a motorcycle jacket over dark clothes. There was a satchel resting on his chair that didn't seem to contain much. His hair was kept in a fashion similar to how Robertus had worn his, though it was a bit looser, tousled by the wind of a high-speed drive.

"It is all quite unexpected, Hannibal."

"Thank you for receiving me on such short notice."

"You didn't leave me much choice on the matter. Why couldn't it wait until tomorrow?"

"I don't believe I will be there tomorrow."

"It has been more than two years. There is some catching up to do. What have you been up to."

Hannibal, now wearing a face unsettling similar to the one Jack knew, turned away from the windows to look at the psychiatrist. He didn't sit however. He remained there, with his jacket. Only his bag sitting on the chair was indicating that he didn't plan on walking out right away.

"I have faired well in school. Very well. I found that the Parisian life, between culture and independence, suits me well."

"But..."

"No but. That is one fact. Another fact is that I tried Sodium Thiopental."

Jack was not familiar with that substance, and it left Rufin puzzled as well.

"You know, Hannibal, it is pretty rare for someone to tell me 'I'm doing well and drugs' and have both statements be perfectly honest."

"Zeugmas. Always pleasant for the mind. Yet it is true."

"Why did you try that?"

Hannibal didn't answer and went back to the windows and the night, which he had never left to start with.

"Aren't those some hypnotic substances?" Rufin filled it. "They are not your usual drugs, are they now? Why that choice?"

"Do wonders for memories."

Jack and Rufin shared a similar silence, telling of a gradual understanding.

"Do you remember?" Rufin finally said, voicing Jack's question.

"Yes. Not at first, not everything. But after tonight, nothing is left hidden"

"What... What happened to her?"

Jack could see two Hannibal. The one in front of the desk, and the one reflected on the darkened windows. Three if Jack was counting the one he could always guess in the periphery of his sight, just behind his shoulder.

"It does not matter what happened. It is all settled now."

"What do you mean?"

"I went back to Lithuania. I tied up some loose ends. I buried her. Not as much of her as I would have liked, so I buried a bit more than her. I came back and upon my return, Lady Murasaki was waiting for me."

"She knew you had left?"

"No."

"You didn't tell her?"

"I didn't know enough when I left. And I knew too much when I came back. Though I did not know everything."

"What did you know?"

Jack had the unsettling feeling that the Hannibal in the window was looking right at him.

"That there were some loose ends left to tie up in France too. Some wrongs to right. I started doing it, but Lady Murasaki was not too pleased about it."

"What did she say?"

"She begged me to stop."

"Did you stop?"

"No."

Jack moved his head left and right, but the eyes were following him. Inescapable.

"She ended up being caught in the middle."

"Oh God, is she alright?"

"She is. I found her in time."

"Hannibal, please, stop those riddles and tell me what happened. Do you need me to call the police?"

Hannibal turned around and, at last, his reflection stopped looking at Jack.

"Inspector Popil is quite aware already. Lady Murasaki walked out unscathed and, as I said, everything is now settled. Mischa is a matter of the past and I'm progressing forward, burden-free."

"Hannibal, why did you come here tonight? Why did you want to speak with me?"

Hannibal remained perfectly still for a couple of seconds and, if Jack hadn't known any better, he could have believed that the young man was... bothered.

"Something happened," he finally said.

"A lot happened, apparently."

"Something that was there and then gone so quickly I am unsure it even was at all."

Rufin slowly nodded, holding on to the parts of the conversations he could make sense of.

"What happened, Hannibal?"

Hannibal's eyes were on Rufin but Jack could tell his gaze was turned inward.

"I kissed someone."

"Oh... Mmh, I see."

Rufin straightened up, apparently not expecting that confession. Jack himself, though he knew Lecter well, wouldn't have pictured such a smooth transition between murders and first dates.

"Someone you love?"

"Someone I love deeply."

Something in Hannibal's answer triggered Rufin's suspicion who cracked the situation before Jack could.

"Someone who is connected to you in a social way that makes it impossible for you to date them?"

"No biological connection," was all Hannibal answered.

Jack finally understood.

"Hannibal, you can't..." Rufin sighed, at loss for words but still keeping a professional calm. "It is wrong on so many different levels. And you know it."

"It certainly didn't feel wrong."

"Hannibal, you are seventeen and she is your adoptive mother."

"One of those two statements is misleading; the other is untrue."

"Which one is untrue?"

"Lady Murasaki is not my adoptive mother. I was abandoned a week ago. I don't have a mother anymore."

He had said it flatly, that fact provoking no extreme feelings in him. No feelings at all actually.

"What do you mean?"

"We had a moment. After years of fondness and interposed poetry, we shared a few hours hidden from the sun. In the morning she was crying. She didn't cry when Uncle Robertus died. She never cried for Popil either. But the sunlight on us made her cry. I left. I know when I am not welcomed anymore. Though I didn't leave without telling her how sincere my love for her was. But then it was gone."

"Why do you want to tell me about it? You know I will not approve of it. If anything, it makes me incredibly worried about you, Hannibal, and there is nothing I want more than to pull you out of that situation."

"I have little care for approval. Your worries are kind but powerless. And there is no situation from which to pull me out."

"Then why?"

"Because it happened. Because its disappearance doesn't mean it never existed."

"Hannibal, please, sit down."

Hannibal walked closer to the chair, but it was all the extent of his compliance. He wasn't too agitated to sit down but it was obvious he had no plan on settling.

"What happened after that night?"

"The next day is when she found herself in the middle of my quarrels. We only exchanged a couple of words afterward."

"What did she say?"

"She wondered what was left in me to love."

"That... is a harsh question to ask. And it puts an unfair and hurtful blame on you."

"Not an unfair one."

Hannibal rested his hand on the back of the chair where he didn't sit.

"I came to you because you know of my honesty and of her integrity. If someone needs to remember for that moment to have existed, then your memory will do us both justice."

"You won't remember?"

"One does not make a truth. It makes a belief. At worst, a hope. Two make truths."

"You and your aunt make two."

"She left. She ran away. I don't blame her. She is grieving a child she loved dearly and that she lost tragically."

"When you say she left..."

"... She is back in Japan. According to her note. Her flat is empty, and no phone number has been left behind."

"Hannibal... What will you do now? If she cannot be contacted, then maybe a friend of the family, or maybe..."

"Do not worry yourself, Doctor, I know where I am going."

"And where are you going?"

Hannibal's eyes lingered on the bag on the chair. It couldn't have been containing more than a couple of items.

"I have been planning my departure for a week or so. Not that long but enough. Hopkins, in Baltimore, may be interested in having me. I will go there. I admit my departure is a bit more... rushed than I would have liked it to be, but it is nothing I am not ready for."

"Why are you in a rush? Why can't you wait?"

"Inspector Popil made sure I couldn't stay any longer."

"What did he do?"

"He called the social workers on me. He wanted to see Lady Murasaki, found her flat empty. Pieced it all together, little clever detective that he is. He says it is what Lady Murasaki would want. Wouldn't have liked the idea of me fending for myself. I believe he knew full well that it would drive me out of the country. I've done institutions once. Not interested in more."

"Hannibal... it may be difficult to hear, but I think it was the right call to make. You have no family and very little means. You are still a minor, albeit not for long. You cannot just be on your own. If no family can take you in, you need to let the social workers help you. When will they come?"

"They already came. When I asked for Inspector Popil to leave, they insisted on it too. Once he was gone, it was not too hard to walk out undetected and unbothered. I didn't have much to pack."

"What did you pack?"

"Identity papers, an essay I wrote on metamorphosis, Huygens' treatise on light, and a motorcycle."

"You don't have any money..."

"I had ten francs but I walked by a church on my way here so I donated them to the poor."

"I hope you're not planning on... what... taking a boat to the United States?"

"That was my plan exactly."

"Hannibal, you can't. You have nothing. What will you do once there? Where will you live?"

"I will figure."

"Homelessness is a serious matter, Hannibal. A dangerous one."

"I would know that, Doctor."

Hannibal grabbed the strap of his satchel and put it on his shoulder.

"My duty of confidentiality stops when I start to believe there may be someone in danger. You've been giving me reasons to fear dangers for a while, now Hannibal. I can help you, with the social workers. I will continue to work by your side. But if you leave that office, I will tell Inspector Popil where you plan on going."

"Go ahead. As I said, no secret. And I don't think he will care much. There are few things he desires less than going after me."

Now ready to leave, Hannibal looked at Rufin one last time.

"I came to you to tell you about what happened. You have been fair to me, Doctor Rufin. And kind to my uncle. You have been an assistant he didn't know he needed. For that, I owe you. There wasn't much of me you could have hoped to find, but please, bear witness of some form of gentleness while it existed. I will be on my way now, and you on yours. Thank you, Doctor."

Hannibal walked to the door, his shoes making the wood crack under his weight. Had it been his mute, immobile younger self, the wood wouldn't have been moved, but the boy turned man was now too heavy to be ignored.

"Hannibal, one last question."

Hannibal stopped in the doorway. Out of politeness if nothing else.

"The first words you said in this office. You said you wished your uncle had brought back your sister instead of you. Why did you think that?"

"Because then one of them would have survived."

"One of them who?"

"Mischa and Hannibal. Goodbye Doctor. You should rest now. You look tired."

And it was the last sentence Rufin had recorded of Hannibal Lecter.

As it had happened five times before, the video stopped, and Jack remained alone with a black screen and his reflection. Except that this time, nothing would come to distract him from it.

He didn't call Alana. He had nothing to say and calling her to share his silence simply felt too unjust. She deserved much better. She had not made the choice to dive into the cursed videos. To rub salt on the wound. And, after that night, it was not a black screen and a reflection that were meant to welcome her. She had a child and a wife to go back to. Some humanity.

Jack drove alone. Showered alone. Sat in bed alone.

And he wished he could have dreamed alone as well.

He was in one of the interrogation rooms of the headquarters. One of those he knew by heart. Many killers had been brought in.

A boy was sitting in front of him. With a skeletal face and well-behaved hands.

Jack needed a confession. He needed to rip it off those starving lips.

"Do you know?"

Do I know what? the silence answered.

"Do you know who you will become? Are you already aware?"

Do you even know what it is that I became? the silence insinuated.

"Answer me. Do you already know who you will become?"

"What I am, Jack, is unbothered."

Jack couldn't hear the silence anymore. His heart was beating too loudly. He knew he was there. Hannibal, his adult, monstrous, well-known self, was standing behind the two-way mirror. Looking at Jack and the boy with amused curiosity.

Jack didn't take his eyes off the boy. He didn't know if he could bear the sight of the Ripper if he wasn't weakened and diluted in some ways.

"Unbothered by what?"

"By realism."

The man took the place of the boy in front of Jack. Distorting logic in a way that felt coherent.

The boy was still there, however. Between them, on the table of the interrogation room. Dressed in vegetables and seasonings.

Hannibal Lecter handed Jack a fork.

"Surely you can manage yet another bite."

Jack's hand instinctively reached for the fork, his eyes fixed in horror on the adult figure of the Ripper.

"You ate him..." he whispered, out of breath.

"I did. To grow taller and stronger. And you've been nibbling on him too all night long. Look how tall you will become once you'll have digested him. Now quit the pretenses and have a mouthful."

Jack threw up both in his dream and on his bed.

In another country, not as far away as many would have hoped, Hannibal Lecter was cutting and chopping on the pristine surfaces of his kitchen.

If he didn't want the meat to spoil, he needed to put all the different parts of the body in their freezer before the sun could rise. With temperatures such as the ones they had during the day, it was not wise to let them in the open for too long. Hannibal didn't like waste.

"What are you doing?"

Will was in the doorway, in his tee-shirt and underwear, the red mark of the pillow on his cheek, his hair tousled in every direction. He yawned, his eyes engulfed in sleep.

"Why are you not in bed?" Will whispered.

"Mr Pontirez needs some trimming."

"Wait... he is dead?"

"Yes. I killed him during the night."

"Why?"

"Why not?"

Will thought on that answer for a moment then nodded. Yes, it all made sense. That was answering all of his questions.

"I see. Well, when you're done, come back to bed."

"Will."

Will was on his way back to the bedroom and he stopped at his name. Hannibal didn't add anything. It wasn't needed. Will always understood Hannibal's silences. To his ears, they were limpid and talkative.

He walked to Hannibal, kissed the Ripper's lips, and made his way back to his bed.

Hannibal continued to chop and cut.

'Ah, to be seen so fully' he could have been thinking.

But it wasn't what was on his mind at this moment.

What was on his mind, among other worldly and unworldly matters, was that preparing some bacon for Will in the morning would make him incredibly happy.

Life was simple for Hannibal.

And joyful.

He didn't quite get what the rest of humanity had to be gloomy about.

End Notes

I hope you enjoyed it. I've put a lot of heart and efforts into it and even if it's not perfect I hope you had a nice time reading it.

Let me know what you thought, if you feel like it, but in any case, have a nice day/night and take care ;)

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!